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ARTISTIC WOOD WORK.

IN artistic wood work, artistic either in style of construction or details of ornamentation, practical utility, or propriety and fitness, necessarily takes the lead. On this point diversities of taste create no difficulties, but rather stimulate inventive suggestiveness. As to decoration, the folly of simply imitating ancient productions is very fully recognized; genius and individuality, whilst embodying the features of a style aim at something of their own. As a consequence, we have a constant succession of novelties, many with new and charming characteristics.

This is not to say that many errors are not committed as in the production of some too unwieldy articles of furniture of solid work, the carving of sideboards into projecting knobs, points and crooks as though specially designed to contuse limbs and catch dresses, the carving of the backs of chairs at levels that make the carving appear designed as instruments of torture for the head, under the idea that all this is true Renaissance, and further, and with the same idea, giving to furniture as gloomy a hue as possible, whereas the productions of the middle age were constantly of woods of beautiful color, often exquisitely veined, and if naturally dark were brightened up by inlays of agate, carnelia, lapis lazuli, colored marbles, pearl and ivory.

Scenic effects in artistic wood work are mainly produced by breaking up flatness, by variety of planes, either at different angles or parallel to each other, by play of perspective effect, when on a large scale, and by decided contrast of light and shade, together with "cast shadows" thrown by projecting parts on retiring surfaces. Dexterous design and execution are as nothing without judicious application of embellishment.

The tendency of the day is to give bold designs, whilst avoiding an overwrought or florid style, combining careful attention to minutiae with judicious combination and arrangement.

As to workmanship it is sufficient to say that great skill and practice are requisite in the laying down of masses and in finishing touch, due regard being paid to the qualities of the wood. Machinery has not interfered with, but rather promoted artistic work in wood, for the work of the hand asserts its superiority. Arabesque work, willow patterns, etc., are frequently combined with carved handwork, and so economize production. Indeed, a rotating pivot with different descriptions of blades attached is adapted to any profile or molding now made.

Among ingenious constructions which have attracted our notice is a table, the writing desk of which takes the exterior form of a drawer. As it is pulled out a simple cloth-covered plane rises to the required angle by a hidden cam attachment and the drawer front attached by hinges falls down. On closing, a reverse action takes place. The desk as it recedes sinks to the level of the drawer recess, affords ample space for any books that may have been lying on it. Secret drawers for escritoires are coming into use, their arrangement displaying great ingenuity. A variation in sideboards is in placing the central portion, composed of framed beveled glass at an angle so that the contents, consisting of wine glasses and decanters, are visible. The Moorish horse shoe form, richly carved, is being used with good effect to span the central recesses of bookcases.

The Italian principle of setting off carved by reflective surfaces is in numerous instances being very skillfully dealt with. Looking glasses are being encircled, as in the old style, with small bulls' eye shaped glasses which pleasingly multiply the reflections. Massive pedestals of ebony hue, with rich carvings gilded and otherwise enriched, show a creditably tasteful variety of design.

Pier glasses of great originality and beauty of design deserve mention. Elegantly mounted, they never fail to present a luxurious appearance. A return to wooden mantel-pieces is something new. Though far from dispossessing marble and metal, their adoption is justified by the fine effects brought out. Main features are elaborately adorned, recesses rising up high against the wall either open or faced with bevel-edged glass, and pilasters, pillars, or carotides supporting cornices, the entablatures bearing trophies of natural ornaments, decorative scutcheons, carved heads, and appropriate pendants, the whole enhanced by mountings in metal.

Excellent work is shown in clock cases, pedestal style, the designs being an important modification of those of former times. Instead of an unbroken front of wood, a lightsome appearance is imparted by the device of a recess above the base showing chased and embossed or plated pendulum and weight, and setting off to better advantage the side figures that support the cornice at the

base of the clock face, itself surrounded by scroll patterns and borders in wood of varied design, the entablature showing carved figures. These clock cases form imposing adornments for halls and stair landings.

We might more fully emulate the Italians in ornamenting doors with carving enriched with marquetry, thus enlisting wood more fully into the service of architectural beauty, instead of leaving these very prominent features of exteriors and interiors to be worked on the carpenter's bench. Some good artistic work is, however, ap-

pearing in the caps of inside doors supported by richly carved brackets, also in crests embodying ornamental caprices.

The costliness of wood decoration of ceilings, in the form of sunk panels with carved borders and centers and coloring, airy and delicate, if the wood itself be not rich and rare, and so sufficiently ornamental, alone prevents the more extensive adoption of this means of enhancing the beauty

of interiors; but it is in the power of architects greatly to reduce the cost by providing sunk panels in the original construction, leaving these panels to be afterwards decorated according to the judgment and taste of individuals.

Art is shown in simple as well as in elaborate and costly work. A highly decorative application of wood is in bending beach by steam and moisture to take artificially curved forms suitable for light furniture, as settees, rocking chairs, and cradles. The most complicated convolutions are possible. The central panel of ancient Italian cabinets constituting superb examples of carving, frequently exhibit in relief in the central panel such figures as Ceres with sickle in hand, and Pomona and Vertumnus bearing the fruits of the earth.

Excessive delight is often shown by Italian designers indulging in minute details, yet this, through contrastive design introduced, is not inconsistent with the whole effect being rich and bold. The vital force in the intention of the artist conduces to unity. There is a wonderful wealth of ornament in the Italian school; in marquetry even the grain of the different woods used is disposed in different directions for picturesque effects.

The most striking characteristics of the Italian Renaissance style, which blended in various ways and proportions the Gothic and ancient Roman, are shown in sideboards, cabinets, clock cases and other massive articles of furniture of circular archivolts, springing immediately from slightly relieved pilasters or carotides, the latter being supporting figures to the entablature, grotesque, mythological, or fanciful. The pilasters have simple but usually tasteful enrichments of foliage and carved mouldings. The objects on which the energies of the early Italian wood workers were principally concentrated were cabinets, carved doors, screens, pulpits, linings to rooms, fittings to sacristies and shops, such as the *spezzerie* or drug stores attached to the principal monastic establishments.

In furniture two objects were particularly selected for decoration, the one the great chest or *cassapanca*, in which the linen and many of the valuables of an Italian household were usually preserved, and the *cassone*, or large chests, in which the trousseau of the bride and her dowry were generally kept.

At a later period great ebony cabinets were wrought with marvelous skill at Venice, and were subsequently well imitated in France and Germany. The most beautiful specimens of wood carving to be seen in Italy were the arabesques on the stalls of the church of St. Pietro del Casinensi, executed by Stefano da Bergamo.

The business of the future in artistic wood work is to unite the best construction with the best ornamental forms, the handling of styles with freedom and without any strict adherence to precedents. We recognize the tendency to recur to the simpler forms of ancient art, with truthful construction. The solid work now preferred gives far greater scope to variety than veneering.

The production of a good ebony hue being of no little importance to artistic wood workers, we herewith furnish the best approved process as practised at a leading manufactory on the continent, one which gives a beautiful dead black color with lustrous polish, very superior to much in the way of artificial ebony that we have seen. The wood is first covered with a coat of camphor dissolved in water, this being followed almost immediately after by another coat composed chiefly of sulphate of iron and nut gall. The two compositions make an indelible tinge. When dry the surface is rubbed with a hard brush of couch grass; then with charcoal as light and friable as possible. The flat parts are rubbed with a stick of natural charcoal, the indented parts with powder. The wood is now alternately rubbed with linseed oil and essence of peppermint, operations repeated several times. The black receives a beautiful color with high polish which does not tarnish.

THERE is an old story of a French courtier, who had a wine beaker made of his mistress's high heeled shoe. We do not yet go as far as that, but glass slippers are used on dinner tables to hold the flower favors of the banqueters, and old dancing slippers, gilded and bedizened with ribbons, serve as bouquet and autumn leaf holders on the parlor tables of "our best society."

THE finest art of decorating is not to spend the most money or make a show with the least, but to make what money you spend do the very best it can. It does not matter how much or how little you have to lay out if you have the judgment to lay it out in the right way.



CARVED PANEL, BY L. BAILLOT, OF NELSON, MATTER & CO.